

# ***Psalms***

## ***Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land***

Lesson #5 for February 3, 2024

Scriptures: Psalm 22:1; 69:1-3; 73:1-20; 77; 79:5-13; 88:3-12; 137:4; 1 Peter 1:17.

1. What does the term *a strange land* mean? Does it mean more than captivity in Babylon?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] We do not need to get deep into the book of Psalms in order to discover that the Psalms are uttered in an imperfect world, one of sin, evil, suffering, and death. The stable creation run by the Sovereign Lord and His righteous laws is constantly threatened by evil. As sin corrupts the world more and more, the earth has increasingly become “a strange land” to God’s people. This reality creates a problem for the psalmist: **How does one live a life of faith in a strange land?**

As we already have seen, the psalmists acknowledge God’s sovereign rule and power, as well as His righteous judgments. They know that God is the everlasting and never-failing refuge and help in times of trouble. For this reason, the psalmists are at times perplexed (who isn’t?) by the apparent absence of God and the flourishing of evil in the face of the good and Sovereign Lord. The paradoxical nature of the Psalms as prayers is demonstrated in the psalmists’ responses to God’s seeming silence. In other words, the psalmists respond to God’s perceived absence, as well as to God’s presence.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sabbath Afternoon, January 27.<sup>†‡</sup>

[BSG:] The presence of suffering and evil in our midst raises perplexing questions in the minds of many about **God’s character**. Why did God allow sin to exist? Why does He allow the innocent to suffer? Why does He permit sin and suffering to continue? **Why do the wicked prosper?** Have God’s promises in the Bible failed? Is Scripture merely a beautiful literary masterpiece—inspiring but not divinely inspired—for spiritually inclined people? Or worse, are the Bible and its promises the delusions of pious minds? Are they without any basis in reality because, ultimately, God, as secular minds allege, doesn’t exist? Sad to say, this line of inquiry is all too common among many minds today. The questioning of God’s actions plants the seeds of incredulity and skepticism in the hearts of others, especially among the youth. All too often, when such questions of unbelief arise in the minds of believers, the result is that “ ‘the love of many will grow cold’ ” (*Matt. 24:12, NKJV*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 65.<sup>†‡§</sup>

**Matthew 24:12:** “Such will be the spread of evil that many people’s love will grow cold.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Matthew 24:12). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].<sup>†‡</sup>

[BSG:] The Psalms are more than pretty songs in praise of God. They are meant to exert a profound impact on our understanding of such complex issues as the existence of sin and suffering. As we analyze the Psalter in light of this challenging subject, we again marvel at the raw honesty of the psalmists in their prayers. Their candor reminds us that we, too, can ask questions of the

Lord; we also can express our doubts to Him. God will listen to our concerns happily if we inquire of Him in faith and humility. He will reply to our humble questions and concerns, giving us light in the midst of our struggle with doubt and fear.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 65.‡

2. The Psalms span the full range of human emotions from the highest joy to the deepest depression.

**Psalm 74:18-23:** <sup>18</sup> But remember, O LORD, that your enemies laugh at you, that they are godless and despise you.

<sup>19</sup> Don't abandon your helpless people to their cruel enemies; don't forget your persecuted people!...

<sup>22</sup> Rouse yourself, God, and defend your cause!

Remember that godless people laugh at you all day long.

<sup>23</sup> Don't forget the angry shouts of your enemies, the continuous noise made by your foes.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Psalm 79:9-12:** <sup>9</sup> **Help us, O God, and save us; rescue us and forgive our sins for the sake of your own honour.** [*sic-Br*]

<sup>10</sup> Why should the nations ask us, "Where is your God?"...

<sup>12</sup> LORD, pay the other nations back seven times for all the insults they have hurled at you.—*Good News Bible*.\*†‡

3. Is it all right to talk to God like that?
4. In these Psalms, we see the psalmists trying to struggle with the questions in the great controversy. They remind God in prayer that things are not looking very good for God. But, at the same time, they know that God has infinite wisdom and power.
5. To the peoples in ancient times, everything that was a little hard to understand was assumed to be handled by the "god's." We have suggested repeatedly that when one nation conquered another nation, it was assumed that the god of the conquering nation was more powerful than the god of the losing nation.
6. That same idea now applies to their thinking about evil and sin. When anything evil happens, God must be either responsible, or He allows it. Or, one of the evil gods did it. The psalmists remind us and God, although He already knows this, that when evil succeeds it provides an opportunity for God's enemies to blaspheme His name.
7. The problem is: How does God deal with rebellious people who fail on their side of the contract with Him and yet claim His name.
8. Christians, of course, recognize that, ultimately, God will be the winner; and Satan and all his followers will be the losers.
9. The psalmists look back to the history of the exodus as a great reminder of what God can do. Think of the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, God speaking to them from the fire cloud above the mountain, His leading them by the pillar of fire by night and the pillar

of cloud by day, and then, helping them across the Jordan River after conquering the Amalekites and other nations that had prevented their progress. Finally, He helped them to conquer numerous kings and cities including the fortified city of Jericho. So, Moses concluded:

**Deuteronomy 4:38-39:** <sup>38</sup> “As you advanced, he drove out nations greater and more powerful than you, so that he might bring you in and give you their land, the land which still belongs to you. <sup>39</sup>So remember today and never forget: the LORD is God in heaven and on earth. There is no other god.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

10. The psalmists did not hesitate to acknowledge the fact that the people of Israel were habitual sinners. And that was a problem for God and for His reputation. Many nations recognized that *YAHWEH* was the God of the Israelite people. So, what was God supposed to do when they are misbehaving?

**Psalm 79:8-9:** <sup>8</sup> Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!

Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,  
For we have been brought very low.

<sup>9</sup> Help us, O God of our salvation,

**For the glory of Your name;**

And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,

**For Your name's sake!**—*The New King James Version*.\* (1982). (Psalm 79:8-9) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.†

11. Some of the psalmists were wise enough and educated enough to recognize that more important than the success of Israel as a nation was a defense of God's character before the nations. These ideas are presented in Psalm 74:18-23; Psalm 83:16-18; and Psalm 106:47. Notice some of the highlights:

**Psalm 74:22:** Rouse yourself, God, and defend your cause!

Remember that godless people laugh at you all day long.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Psalm 83:18:** May they know that you alone are the LORD,  
supreme ruler over all the earth.—*Good News Bible*.\*

12. Could those same challenges that God had to deal with in the days of the children of Israel apply to us in our day?

[BSG:] As today, the same principle existed back then. Our sins, our backsliding, our evils, can bring disrepute not only on ourselves but, worse, on the God whose name we profess. Our wrong actions can have detrimental spiritual effects on our witness and mission, as well. How many people have been turned off to our faith by the actions of those professing the name of Christ?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Sunday, January 28.‡

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 671.3.‡

13. Do you consider these issues as you live your life day by day?

14. The issues about God's fairness and His care for His own people come starkly to the front when people are facing serious illness or death. The psalmists recognized that God had the ability to heal all kinds of diseases.

**Psalm 41:1,3-4:** Happy are those who are concerned for the poor;

the LORD will help them when they are in trouble....

<sup>3</sup> The LORD will help them when they are sick  
and will restore them to health.

<sup>4</sup> I said, "I have sinned against you, LORD;  
be merciful to me and heal me."—*Good News Bible*.\*

15. The psalmist issued a challenging question to God, essentially asking: "If I die, can I praise your name? Can I worship you? Can I honor you in any way if I am in the grave?" (Psalm 88:10-12)

**Psalm 88:12:** Are your miracles seen in that place of darkness

**or your goodness in the land of the forgotten?—*Good News Bible*.\*** [Compare Psalm 102:3-5,11,23-24.]<sup>†</sup>

16. The psalmists all obviously recognized that God's faithful people are not exempt from illness, even death. Does God allow trouble to come on his people only because they are sinning? Or do sometimes even innocent people suffer illness and death? Psalm 88 and Psalm 102 are clear examples suggesting that the innocent do suffer despite being faithful followers of God. But there is a promise: (See Psalm 41:3-4 above.)

17. It is important to notice that even when the psalmist felt that he was on death's door, he recognized that God had the power to heal him. Nothing is beyond God's power.

18. What do the sufferings of Christ in those final few days of His life on this earth teach us about God's tolerance for suffering and evil?

19. Would it be okay to ask the question, "Where is God" as you pray to Him? Notice these brief comments:

**Psalm 42:1-2:** <sup>1</sup> As a deer longs for a stream of cool water,  
so I long for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup> I thirst for you, the living God;  
when can I go and worship in your presence?—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Psalm 69:3:** I am worn out from calling for help,  
and my throat is aching.

I have strained my eyes,  
looking for your help.—*Good News Bible*.\*

20. So, when we are suffering or even threatened by death, should the biggest concern be that we are in trouble? Or, that God does not seem to be hearing our prayers for healing?

21. Notice specifically these questions from the psalmist about God's presence or absence.

**Psalm 10:12:** O LORD, punish those wicked people!

Remember those who are suffering!—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Psalm 22:1:** My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

I have cried desperately for help,  
but still it does not come.—*Good News Bible*.\* [Compare Matthew 27:46]†

**Psalm 27:9:** “Don’t hide yourself from me!”

Don’t be angry with me;  
don’t turn your servant away.  
You have been my help;  
don’t leave me, don’t abandon me,  
O God, my saviour. [*sic-Br*]—*Good News Bible*.\*‡

**Psalm 39:12:** Hear my prayer, LORD,

and listen to my cry;  
come to my aid when I weep.  
Like all my ancestors  
I am only your guest for a little while.—*Good News Bible*.\*

22. It is important to notice that even when the psalmist did not seem to be getting answers to his prayers, he continued to recognize God’s existence and continued to pray. He knew that God had done marvelous things for His people in the past, and he continued mentioning that in his prayers. They knew that God will come forth one day.
23. Have you ever had an experience when it seemed like God was not hearing you? What did you do? What should you do? Asaph became so concerned about what appeared to be God’s absence that he wrote Psalm 77. What do you think the author was going through?
24. **Read Psalm 77:1-20:** *When you are in trouble and God does not seem to answer, does that makes things worse? Can you still trust Him? If you review the times when God has taken vigorous action in the past, does it make your distress seem even worse? Is it possible that God has changed?*
25. While weeping and crying and suffering all night long, the psalmist renewed his resolve to trust in God. (Psalm 77:5,10) Think of other times when God used experiences of sleeplessness to bring about great good. Consider the story of Pharaoh’s dreams (Genesis 41:1-8); the night the king couldn’t sleep and heard about Mordecai’s effort to save his life (Esther 6:1); and when Nebuchadnezzar could not sleep and Daniel was taken in to interpret his dreams (Daniel 2:1-3). What should these stories teach us about trouble sleeping when we have serious problems facing us?
26. The psalmist also recognized that God could be active; but, yet, we may not be aware of what He is doing. How should we respond to such a situation? Have you had such experiences in the past? Read Psalm 37:1,8; 49:5-7; 94:3-7; and 125:3. What should we do when it appears like the wicked are prospering and God’s faithful people are not? Is the problem that God is not paying attention? Do the wicked seem to be saying the following?

**Psalm 94:7:** They say, “The LORD does not see us;  
the God of Israel does not notice.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

27. There are even times when the wicked oppress God’s faithful people. Should that be impossible considering God’s justice and power as He rules the universe?

28. Fortunately, the psalmist came to some wonderful conclusions:

**Read Psalm 73:1-20,27:**

*<sup>27</sup> Those who abandon you will certainly perish;  
you will destroy those who are unfaithful to you.—Good News Bible.\**

29. Should we agree with his conclusion?

30. The New Testament seems to give us a similar picture.

**1 Peter 1:17:** You call him Father, when you pray to God, who judges all people by the same standard, according to what each one has done; so then, spend the rest of your lives here on earth in reverence for him.—*Good News Bible.\**

31. However, It is important to notice that several of the Psalms suggest we need to go to God's sanctuary to look for answers for our prayers.

32. Does it comfort you to know that in the end God will destroy the wicked and save the righteous?

33. In her final chapter in *Steps to Christ* entitled, "Rejoicing in the Lord," Ellen White dealt very well with several of the problems we have been discussing. God intends for us to believe in Him, to trust Him, and to serve as beacons of light to all around us. But, when we allow grief and sorrow and pain to sink us into doubts about God, we are making a serious mistake.

[EGW:] Let us keep fresh in our memory all the tender mercies that God has shown us,—the tears He has wiped away, the pains He has soothed, the anxieties removed, the fears dispelled, the wants supplied, the blessings bestowed,—thus strengthening ourselves for all that is before us through the remainder of our pilgrimage.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ\** 125.1.‡

34. In Psalm 57 the psalmist recognized that when he prayed, eventually, God would respond and his enemies would be turned back.

35. The children of Israel were in a strange land when they were in Egypt. They were in an even more strange land when in Babylonian captivity. And what about us? **As we continue to dwell in this world full of sin and evil, are we not still in a strange land?**

36. Ellen White gave us some good advice.

[EGW:] Summon all your powers to look up, not down at your difficulties; then you will never faint by the way. You will soon see Jesus behind the cloud, reaching out His hand to help you; and all you have to do is to give Him your hand in simple faith and let Him lead you. As you become trustful you will, through faith in Jesus, become hopeful.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,\** vol. 5, 578.2-579.0.‡

37. When God seems to be hiding His face and holding His hands behind His back, do not stop praying.

**Psalm 77:10-12:** <sup>10</sup> Then I said, "What hurts me most is this—that God is no longer powerful."

<sup>11</sup> I will remember your great deeds, LORD;

I will recall the wonders you did in the past.

<sup>12</sup> I will think about all that you have done;

I will meditate on all your mighty acts.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Psalm 89:46-52:** <sup>46</sup> LORD, will you hide yourself for ever [*sic-Br*]?

How long will your anger burn like fire?

<sup>47</sup> Remember how short my life is;

remember that you created all of us mortal!

<sup>48</sup> Who can live and never die?

How can human beings keep themselves from the grave?

<sup>49</sup> Lord [*sic*], where are the former proofs of your love?

Where are the promises you made to David?

<sup>50</sup> Don't forget how I, your servant, am insulted,

how I endure all the curses of the heathen.

<sup>51</sup> Your enemies insult your chosen king, O LORD!

They insult him wherever he goes.

<sup>52</sup> Praise the LORD for ever [*sic-Br*]!

Amen! Amen!—*Good News Bible*.\*‡

Psalm 89 is cited in its Hebrew title as “A poem by Ethan the Ezrahite.”

[From the SDA Bible Dictionary:] Etahn 1. A Judahite, son of Zerah (1 Chr 2:6). He was probably the Ezrahite famous for his wisdom, mentioned in 1 Ki 4:31. Some identify him with the “Ethan the Ezrahite” in the superscription of Ps 89, but it is not certain when this Ethan lived.—*SDA Bible Dictionary*.‡

[EGW:] Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 3, 555.2.‡

38. The ultimate question that Christians sometimes ask is: Why does God allow sin and suffering to exist? Notice the psalmist comments about that question.

[BSG:] What tensions did the psalmists experience in the face of evil? What similar tensions have you faced, and how have you dealt with them? How do you maintain your faith during these times?

Where should we look for answers when our faith in God is tested by trials or by people whose own sufferings cause them to question the goodness and power of God?

How do you answer the common question about evil in a world created and sustained by an all-powerful God of love? How does the great controversy motif help answer, at least somewhat, this challenge?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, February 2.‡

**Psalm 74:1** [A poem by Asaph:] Why have you abandoned us like this, O God?

Will you be angry with your own people for ever [*sic-Br*]?:—*Good News Bible*.\*‡

[BSG:] The Psalms are more than pretty songs in praise of God. They are meant to exert a profound impact on our understanding of such complex issues as the existence of sin and suffering. As we analyze the Psalter in light of this challenging subject, we again marvel at the raw honesty of the psalmists in

their prayers. Their candor reminds us that we, too, can ask questions of the Lord; we also can express our doubts to Him. God will listen to our concerns happily if we inquire of Him in faith and humility. He will reply to our humble questions and concerns, giving us light in the midst of our struggle with doubt and fear.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 65.‡

39. A careful look at **Psalm 74 and Psalm 79** raises a lot of important questions.

[BSG:] Each psalm deals with the destruction of the beloved city [Jerusalem] (*Ps. 74:3–9, Ps. 79:1–4*), which elicits plaintive laments from the psalmist.

In both psalms, Asaph wants to see the Lord overturn the destruction (*Ps. 74:10, 11; Ps. 79:5–7*). Thus, he inquires of the Lord, “How long?”

The cause of Jerusalem’s misfortunes is the sin of the people (*Ps. 79:8–10*). Only Psalm 79 mentions this reason: God’s people have failed.

In both songs, Asaph doesn’t lose faith in his heavenly King (*Ps. 74:12–17*) or confidence in “the greatness of Your power” (*Ps. 79:11, NKJV*).

As Asaph, we may ask why we face sin, suffering, and death. These are the universal questions that inquiring minds have asked from the dawn of human history. The answer is always the same: sin. Sin is the strange intruder in God’s creation. From Satan’s fall in heaven to our fallen condition today, iniquity has spawned all the suffering and death in history. We could argue, justifiably, that God has given free will to His creatures and, from there, philosophize about the ramifications of sin and suffering. But the biblical writers refrain from this tack. Let us then, as Asaph did, trust in our Creator’s power and wisdom to resolve this question in His own way and time.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 65-66.‡§

40. In dealing with the question: “*Why does God allow the innocent to suffer?*” we should carefully read Psalm 66, Psalm 41, Psalm 88, and Psalm 102. Notice in conclusion:

**Psalm 102:16-19:** <sup>16</sup> When the LORD rebuilds Zion,

he will reveal his greatness.

<sup>17</sup> He will hear his forsaken people  
and listen to their prayer.

<sup>18</sup> Write down for the coming generation what the LORD has done,  
so that people not yet born will praise him.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD looked down from his holy place on high,  
he looked down from heaven to earth.—*Good News Bible*.\*

[BSG:] First, we note that these four songs [Psalms 6; 41; 88; and 102] describe the suffering that the psalmists experience because of illness (*Ps. 6:2, 6, 7; Ps. 41:3; Ps. 88:3–9; Ps. 102:3–7, 9–11*). Second, the psalmists plead with the Lord for healing (*Ps. 6:2, 4; Ps. 41:1, 4; Ps. 88:1, 2, 13, 14; Ps. 102:1, 2*). They consider their healing to be a vindication from God in the presence of their enemies (*Ps. 6:8–10, Ps. 41:5–12, Ps. 102:15–19*). Finally, they argue persuasively that, had they died, they would have been bereft of the opportunity to praise God’s name (*Ps. 6:5, Ps. 88:10–12*).



At this point in our analysis, we should note that the Hebrew mind was not interested in asking philosophical questions about human pain and suffering. Rather, its focus was on God and His glory. The psalmists acknowledge that the Lord permits their sorrows (*Ps. 6:1*). They also acknowledge that He alone can give health. Cured of their afflictions, they want to testify to God's healing mercies.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 66.†§

41. Notice especially that even when the psalmist was crying out that God seemed to have disappeared or was hiding His face, the psalmist still recognized God's presence and prayed for God to help him. Shouldn't we have the same response?

[BSG:] The answer that the writer himself provides is simple but crucial: remember in the present the miracles that God has wrought for you in the past (*Ps. 77:11–20*). "I will remember the works of the LORD" (*Ps. 77:11, NKJV*). Thereafter, the psalmist describes the most paradigmatic moment of God's intervention in Israel's history: the Exodus [*sic*] from Egypt. The psalmist recalls the wonders that YHWH [*sic*] performed when He delivered His people from Egyptian bondage (*Ps. 77:14, 15*). Special attention is given to the miraculous parting of the Red Sea (*Ps. 77:16–19*): "Your way was in the sea" (*Ps. 77:19, NKJV*). The psalmist also recalls how God guided the ministry of Moses and Aaron (*Ps. 77:20*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 67.†§

[EGW:] "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history."—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*,\* January 29, 1893, par. 5; *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 9, 10.3. [Preface]‡

42. In conclusion, we can look at Psalm 37 and see a number of issues spelled out in detail in the Teachers Bible Study Guide.

1. "Trust in the LORD, . . .
2. "Do good;  
*Promise*: "Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness" (*Ps. 37:3, NKJV*).
3. "Delight yourself also in the LORD,  
*Promise*: "And He shall give you the desires of your heart" (*Ps. 37:4, NKJV*).
4. "Commit your way to the LORD,
5. "Trust also in Him,  
*Promises*: "And He shall bring it to pass" (*Ps. 37:5, NKJV*). "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday" (*Ps. 37:6, NKJV*).
6. "Rest in the LORD,
7. "And wait patiently for Him;
8. "Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass" (*Ps. 37:7, NKJV*).
9. "Cease from anger,
10. "And forsake wrath;
11. "Do not fret—it only causes harm" (*Ps. 37:8, NKJV*).  
*Promise*: "For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (*Ps. 37:9, NKJV*).

This psalm is a masterpiece of literary form and substance. Were we to ardently endeavor to practice the guidelines contained within, we would avoid much disappointment and bitterness. As an extra bonus, the text of the psalm provides us with encouraging promises that motivate us to put its precepts into action.

The psalmist reviews the same concepts in the rest of his song: (a) the prosperity of the wicked ones (*Ps. 37:12, 14*); (b) the command to trust YHWH [*sic*] (*Ps. 37:27, 34, 37*); (c) the behavior of the righteous (*Ps. 37:21, 26, 30, 31*); (d) the destruction of the evildoers (*Ps. 37:10, 13, 15, 22, 35, 36, 38*); and (e) promises for the faithful (*Ps. 37:11, 16–20, 22–25, 28, 29, 32, 33, 39, 40*). The concepts expressed within this psalm make it worthy of our most profound study.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 68.<sup>†‡§</sup>

[BSG:] The psalmist invites us to trust in God in the midst of suffering and trials. More often than not, we may not get clear answers to our most perplexing questions this side of eternity. At times, we may not feel the presence of our heavenly Protector beside us. Or we may feel as if God’s promises are failing. But we must remember the moral imperatives of the psalmists: trust in God, regardless of the circumstances; remember His wonders in your life; study more deeply the Word of God; grab hold of God’s promises; and hold tightly to the Lord! “But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him” (*Ps. 37:39, 40, NKJV*)—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 69.<sup>†§</sup>

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